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Parents of Owen Labrie sex assault victim sue N.H. school

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By Olivia Arnold Globe Correspondent June 02, 2016



SUZANNE KREITER/GLOBE STAFF

The parents of a teenage girl who was sexually assaulted at an elite New Hampshire prep school in 2014 are suing St. Paul's School, which they say did not do enough to protect their daughter, according to a complaint filed on Wednesday.

The lawsuit submitted in US District Court in New Hampshire identified the parents as John and Jane Doe to protect their daughter's privacy. It says that senior student Owen Labrie sexually assaulted the girl, who was then 15 years old, as a "direct result of [St. Paul's] fostering, permitting, and condoning a tradition of ritualized statutory rape."

Prosecutors said at his trial that Labrie was participating in a tradition on campus known as the Senior Salute, where male upperclassmen competed to have sex with younger female students before graduation. Then 18, Labrie assaulted the freshman in May 2014 in an academic building, prosecutors said.

In August 2015, he was acquitted of a felony rape charge, but found guilty of three counts of misdemeanor sexual assault, as the victim was legally too young to give consent. Labrie was also convicted of endangering a child and using computer services to lure a minor, and was later sentenced to a year in prison.

Now 20, Labrie is currently out on bail as he appeals his conviction.

The parents' lawsuit also accuses the school of failing "to meet its most basic obligations to protect the children entrusted to its care."

"These are not people who hate St. Paul's School," said Steven J. Kelly, a lawyer for the family, who noted that the victim's father and sister both graduated from the New England prep school. "They love St. Paul's School, and that's why they're doing this."

Kelly said the family is suing the school for an unspecified amount of money.

In a statement on Wednesday, St. Paul's called the lawsuit "without merit."

"We categorically reject any allegations that St. Paul's School has an unhealthy culture," the institution said. "The safety of our students has been and will continue to be the highest priority for our School."

For the parents of the victim, Kelly said the goal of the lawsuit was "systematic change" in the institution and its return to Episcopal values.

"That can't happen if you have this misogynist culture," Kelly said.

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